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## EPA shuts lead-tainted beaches in Middlesex

Agency says closure could last 5-10 years

BY RYAN HUTCHINS  
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

The Environmental Protection Agency is shutting down 1.3 square miles of coastal property, much of it along Raritan Bay, because dangerous levels of lead were found in the soil.

EPA officials said they would post 4-by-4-foot, bilingual notices warning of the threat posed by contamination, and will install split-rail fences restricting access to the western jetty near Cheesequake Creek in Old Bridge, at a small beach north of the jetty in Sayreville, at the Laurence Harbor sea wall in Old Bridge and at Margaret's Creek to the south.

"Our plan is to post signs — very aggressive signs, with strict language on it — explaining exactly what the threat is," EPA project manager J. Daniel Harkay told about 100 people at the Old Bridge Environmental Commission meeting on Wednesday night.

The EPA said the signs will read: "Public health hazard/ Sand sediment and water contaminated with high levels of lead/ Access to the beach and sea wall located behind these signs is restricted/ No swimming/ No sunbathing/ No fishing." The bills also note that exposure to lead can be especially harmful to children and pregnant women.

The federal officials who spoke Wednesday said they did not know when, how or even if the sites would be cleaned up.

Pressed again and again by angry residents who wanted a timeline for when some sort of remediation might be done, Joseph D. Rotola, the agency's regional Removal Action Branch chief, acknowledged that the sites could be closed for five to 10 years — maybe longer; he doesn't really know. Pat Seppi, who will be the EPA's public liaison, tried to calm the group.

"Even working with the EPA, we get frustrated about the length of time," Seppi said.

Right now, the agency is only in a position to close the areas, notify the public about the danger and continue to look into the extent of the contamination, according to spokeswoman Elizabeth Totman.

"That's why we're investigating the scope of this," she said yesterday.

She said the agency does not  
[See LEAD, Page 20]

## Woman owes life

State Police digital unit helps thwart s

BY TOM HAYDON  
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The call came to State Police in the middle of the night.

Someone from California reported a woman from somewhere in New Jersey had posted a suicide threat on the internet, saying she was going to cut her wrists and take some poison.

For 3½ hours, police raced to identify the woman, finally sending officers to a Sayreville home, where she was found passed out on a couch with self-inflicted injuries and empty bottles of prescription antidepressants around her.

"Nine times out of 10, these are fake or a hoax," said T. Charles Allen of the State Police technology unit. When Sayreville found this woman alive, it was a relief, he said.

Jon'a F. Meyer, an associate professor of criminology at Rutgers University, said people are using technology in unexpected ways.

"They are communicating deep dark secrets to strangers in a way they would say this stuff anonymously,"

## MUNCH



A grinning Spencer Fried, of Warren, holds a matzo as Rabbi Shmuel J. Rubenstein, of the Jewish War Veterans organization, on the campus of Fairleigh Dickinson University in Rutherford, begins Wednesday.